

Darien Beautification Minutes-Sept. 2009

Place: Darien Town Hall
Room B-1

Date: Monday, September 14, 2009 9:30am

Members Present: Suzanne Schutte (suzanneschutte@aol.com); Susan Bhirud (Susanbhirud@aol.com); Sandy Drimal (sandycd@212@aol.com); Sandy Filmer (sfilmer@optonline.net); Bob Baker (rcbjhb2msn.com); John Schlachtenhaufen (swschlach@optonline.net) and Marcia Meinerth (marciameinerth@aol.com).

Guest in attendance: Nancy Burton, representing a new group, Darien.Patch.com, an internet web service that helps municipalities promote town activities and endeavors. Nancy joined this new group in August 2009, and following the BC meeting, submitted an article to their website summarizing details of the 9/14/09 BC meeting.

Review of Membership Status:

It was noted that the following members have officially retired from the Beautification Commission:

Janet Sargent, Commission Chair

Gerry Mc Grath, Treasurer

Marcia confirmed to the BC group that the tribute to Janet Sargent for her 11 years of service will involve a PR opportunity, with Janet and fellow BC member Chris Merritt to be photographed in local papers with Callie Sullivan. Callie will additionally present Janet with an engraved gift.

Presiding members of the board who will be assuming the role of these retired members will be Suzanne Schutte and Marcia Meinerth, respectively.

Current commission member, Bob Baker announced that he would be completing his term in June of 2010. Bob has faithfully overseen the matter related to the legalities involving the size of signs; their placement on town, private, state, or planted island areas as well as appropriate length of stay of signs as they pertain to announcing local or out of town events. Bob did indicate that he would, in all probability continue his interest and passion for this matter as a citizen of Darien.... *Thank you Bob!*

It was additionally noted by Sandy Drimal that she would work with Jon Olmstead on the Adopt A Garden program and would, along with Pam Elliott, take over this responsibility at the end of Jon's term.

BC members also discussed the need to actively begin locating new members to replace the retiring individuals.

Vendors... Billing... and such...

The group discussed the matter of timeliness of receiving bills from vendors as well as the need for the commission to make clear to vendors (perhaps in writing) but certainly verbally as to what the expectations are as they relate to services rendered and invoices received. All in attendance agreed on this matter.

Currently Sandy Filmer is the point person in touch with Susan Haynes of Complete Designs (presently the major vendor for the commission). Sandy agreed to provide more oversight in the review of the invoices submitted prior to sending them for payment to the treasurer.

Status of Budget: Suzanne presented the members present with an informal report indicating that of the 2008/2009 budget, approximately \$26,300.00 has been spent/billed

YTD. These numbers had been supplied by Gerry McGrath, who also reported to Suzanne that he had received no invoices for the months of July/August.

Public Relations Matters:

Mrs. Anne Cary, a former BC member and beautification benefactor on behalf of Darien communicated with the commission, specifically Suzanne, about her concerns for the state of the area located at Tokeneke and Locust Hill Road, next to the I-95 sound barrier currently under construction. She was disappointed with the level of maintenance or lack thereof, with the large amount of trees and shrubs being planted there, and with the lack of watering and subsequent death of many of these plantings.

The area of concern is state property and it was resolved at the meeting that Suzanne would be in contact with Mrs. Cary to let her know that this is out of the commission's domain but that we would keep in touch concerning the matter. Suzanne will also continue to speak with the DPW who have identified the Project Engineer on this effort, to ensure that these concerns are addressed. John S. volunteered to assist by providing the names of individuals on the Tree Commission who worked on the original tree/shrub design, with the idea being to review the design to ensure that it was being correctly implemented.

Department of Public Works: John S. suggested that efforts of the Beautification Commission would be more effective if we increased communications with the DPW. With that agreed upon it was then offered up that we invite a representative of the DPW to at least two board meetings a year.

Please note: After the Beautification Commission meeting on September 13th Marcia Meinerth met with Pat Seeger of the DPW... first to inquire about space for storing the

hanging baskets (more on that later) and second to extend an invitation to one of our meetings. Mr. Seeger's first response was to explain that he and his department were already understaffed... but with further dialogue it was determined that perhaps this could indeed be a worthwhile endeavor.

Mr. Seeger asked to be put on our notification list of meetings and that he would do all possible to attend our next meeting which will be held on October 13th.

The Tea House Building at Grove Street: Dan Dolcetti, a businessman/landlord/resident/builder in town called Suzanne asking for help from the BC in the form of a letter to the property manager/developer of the above referenced property which is being demolished. Apparently the demolition of the Tea House property was being conducted in a manner that was sloppy and detracted from Mr. Dolcetti's efforts to create a highly presentable lawn, garden and commercial property having as gracious a back entrance as the front for the Brooks Brothers and Wild Ginger Restaurant enterprises. Suzanne met with Dan to review the situation, and supplied a letter in late August.

Cemeteries: This report was presented by John Schlachtenhaufen who oversees and coordinates the care of the Darien Cemeteries. Specifically, he addressed the following matters:

Bates-Middlesex Cemetery(located off of Old Kings Highway North)--- a sign was discovered missing and in disrepair. The matter has been tended to, and all is well.

Weed Family Cemetery—is located in an area that makes routine maintenance difficult. It has been weed wacked. Susan Bhirud noted the strategic importance of this site and the need for ongoing maintenance.

Daffodils: the commission will have 10,000 bulbs to plant during the October to early November planting season. Suzanne and her husband have offered to pick them up from the bulb nursery in Bantam, CT to save \$200 in delivery costs. Commission members discussed partnering with other town

groups to lesson the work load of planting so many bulbs.

John S. offered the suggestion that the BC encourage organizations to,(wherever possible),plant bulbs close to stone walls so as not to interfere with mowing and running the risk of having the bulbs mowed down before they get a chance to grow.

Sandy Drimal voiced a concern that the BC needs to supply written instructions to volunteer on how to plant the bulbs (e.g. depth, fertilizer, etc.)

Members were asked to submit to Suzanne the names of organizations that we should consider asking to help with the planting of the bulbs.

Hanging Baskets: the hanging baskets are a town wide attraction and have been enthusiastically received by all. All members present agreed they should stay up for a longer time period than in the past. Sandy Drimal suggested we monitor them before making a 'take down' decision. Chris Merritt is the coordinator for the hanging basket installation and take down. Suzanne mentioned that Cindy Ryan (currently on vacation) had emailed her suggesting that she felt that she could get a competitive quote for baskets for next year from a supplier that she knows in Vista, NY. The group felt that this was a good idea, and that Cindy should coordinate efforts with Chris.

The matter of where to store the baskets was reviewed. It was determined that the commission should find town storage whereby the baskets are kept on town property. In previous years the baskets were stored at Janet Sargents who graciously offered the space under her porch for storage.

Note: In talking with the DPW, Marcia learned that they did not know of any immediate space available at DPW facilities, but suggested we talk to the Fire Commissioner.

Marcia will follow up and report on this at the next BC meeting.

2010 Beautification Commission Priorities:

The group discussed and agreed upon the following priorities for 2010: (not listed in priority order)

1. Planting of the Norwalk/Darien Island on the Post Road – this island serves as a gateway to Darien.
2. General Cleanliness of the downtown business areas. Specifically, stores like Starbucks, CVS and Dunkin Donuts accumulate quite a bit of trash that detracts from the beauty of the downtown area. Also, weeds growing in public sidewalks in the downtown area, sidewalks in need of repair.
3. The Berm on the north side of the Darien railroad station. Dolcetti, in conversation with Suzanne has offered free large boulders and soil for this project. Suzanne will follow up on these proceedings.
4. Noroton Heights: this part of town needs assistance. There needs to be some standardization of planters along Heights Road. The train station area needs attention, along with the raised/walled garden area. The members present felt we should perhaps get Susan Haynes to help with this clean up and ongoing maintenance. The flooding issue was raised and needs to be resolved before the BC spends time/monies in areas where flooding occurs.
5. Need for standardization and conformity in downtown Darien and Noroton Heights in terms of merchant planters/urns/flower boxes. Suggestion was made to partner with the Chamber of Commerce. Suzanne to contact Carol Wilder Tamme to discuss possibilities.

6. Use of Special Account to fund select BC projects.
7. Public relations and promotion to keep the efforts of the Beautification Commission noticeable to the residents of Darien.
8. Exploration of Fundraising options for 2010/2011

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30am.

Respectfully Submitted,

Marcia M. Meinerth